

Navajo Small Farmers Marketing Resource Guide for Traditional Corn and Corn Products

Location of Project: St. Michaels, Arizona (Western Region)

Purpose: The project was designed to help a segment of the community that was interested in trying to grow and sell traditional corn crops. Traditionally, these crops had been picked, carried, husked, and shelled all by hand. To make the production and processing of traditional Navajo corn products more efficient, a guide was developed that identifies sources of appropriate small farm equipment for handling these products. The guide also provides an overview of the types of traditional corn products sold in Navajo country, and provides a profile of current marketing channels.

Accomplishments: Researchers began their quest for small farm equipment by searching on the Internet and by speaking with small farmers of traditional Navajo crops. Through this research, it was discovered that several types of corn processing equipment made it easier to cut kernels off the corn and to husk, shuck, shell, and clean the corn used in manufacturing traditional Navajo corn products.

Researchers also made site visits to numerous flea markets within the Navajo reservation in Arizona and New Mexico to collect and document the following information:

- Tribal and federal law and permit requirements for selling traditional corn products
- Location of flea markets near and around the Navajo reservation
- Types of labeling that appeared on traditional Navajo corn products

Lessons Learned: The popularity of using small-scale mechanical equipment to produce and process traditional Navajo corn products has grown significantly in recent years, partly because farmers have used the Internet to communicate their successes with other interested producers. The properly scaled mechanical equipment makes it much easier to cut kernels off the corn as well as to husk, shuck, shell, and clean the corn for several traditional corn products such as kneel-down-bread, corn mush, and neeshjizhi.

Conclusion: Many Navajo small farmers want to combine non-traditional technology with traditional crops to increase their yields and crop quality. The need to have small-scale farmers produce Navajo traditional products is considered vital if traditional Navajo foods

are to remain accessible to the Navajo people. There is also a strong desire within the Navajo community to expand access of traditional foods for nutritional reasons, as it is believed that incorporating traditional foods into peoples' diets may reduce the current prevalence of diabetes and obesity.